

The Mexican Market For Kosher Foods

By Chad R. Russell

U.S. exporters of kosher food would do well to look to the growing Mexican market for sales. The size of Mexico's Jewish community is around 50,000. While it is not likely to increase much in the next few years, growing numbers of non-Jewish customers are purchasing kosher products, for both quality and sanitary reasons.

Some hotels and restaurants also purchase kosher foods for quality reasons, and to provide banquets for the Jewish community. According to trade contacts in Mexico, food and catering services offer the best potential for kosher products.

Supermarkets in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods in Mexico City normally feature kosher sections for meat, poultry, dairy products and some other processed foods, especially during Passover in the spring. Processed kosher products are often found in specialty delicatessens and Jewish mom-'n'-pop stores.

Kosher product prices generally run 15-50 percent above non-kosher prices. But certain kosher items, such as cheeses, may have lower prices than conventional items, since manufacturers and distributors sometimes agree to standardize prices.

Kosher Certification

In Mexico, two Jewish *kashrut* committees authorize kosher certification of products. They work closely with manufacturers of all types of consumer-ready products to ensure they meet strict Jewish dietary standards. This cooperation allows wholesalers



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and retailers to sell kosher-certified products.

Certifying organizations have arranged with Mexican slaughterhouses to perform kosher slaughter in separate areas of the facilities, under the supervision of rabbis.

Institutional Sales

Some 12-15 kosher caterers operate in Mexico City. They normally obtain their kosher products from food distributors and importers, as opposed to importing the products directly from manufacturers.

Mexican demand for kosher foods has increased more than 30 percent over the past 5 years, because of the many ceremonies and religious holidays celebrated by the Jewish community. While many Jews do not strictly observe kosher laws, they do expect restaurants and caterers to serve them kosher foods during celebrations and religious holidays.

Domestic Production v. Imports

Domestic manufacturers produce approximately 90 percent of fresh kosher products (such as meats and poultry) sold in Mexico. They also supply most of the market's canned and frozen products.

Mexican stores import many kosher items especially for important Jewish holidays. After the holidays end, stores often return to selling domestic kosher foods. The

United States is the number one foreign supplier of kosher foods.

Kosher Promotion

The marketing of kosher foods in Mexico is a two-step process. The first step is to obtain kosher certification. The second step is to reach kosher consumers through press releases and advertisements in the Jewish media. The kosher consumer tends to be brand-loyal, interested in quality and well-read, making print media an effective promotional tool.

Many leading kosher manufacturers use the certification symbols to obtain preferred placement for their products in stores. Some food retailers in large Jewish communities give priority to kosher-certified brands when allocating critical shelf space.

The best way to promote kosher products in Mexico is through religious organizations, specialty distributors and caterers. Mexico City has 10-12 Jewish publications, including newspapers and magazines, that advertise kosher products. Each community has its own publications, all of which have kosher food sections.

Many Mexican supermarkets and large retail food chains have kosher food sections that would be ideal for in-store promotional activities. ■

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